

Pamphlet, Uniacke and Field

by

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Introduction

The adventures of the castaways Pamphlet¹, Finnegan and Parsons at Moreton Bay in 1823 were originally written down by John Uniacke, a member of Oxley's expedition, soon after Pamphlet and Finnegan were rescued. The story was given wider circulation in 1825 by Barron Field in his *Geographical Memoirs of New South Wales*, published in London².

A manuscript of unknown origin, now in the Mitchell Library, also tells the castaways' story; it is printed here by permission.

The present article compares the manuscript version with Field's version, and concludes that the manuscript is the work of John Uniacke, and that it was revised and enlarged by Barron Field for his published version.

In both versions there is a gap in the narrative; the journey from Redcliffe to Bribie was never recorded. This article explains how the gap occurred, and why it was not corrected by Field. A study of the chronology of the castaways' activities reveals that the gap corresponds to the months of July, August and September 1823.

Summary of the castaways' adventures

Pamphlet, Finnegan and Parsons were ticket-of-leave convicts who, on 21 March 1823, set out in a boat from Sydney to buy cedar at Illawarra. They were blown out to sea by a gale. After more than three weeks they landed on the east coast of Moreton Island, and their boat was broken up by the surf. They believed they were to the south of Sydney, and attempted to reach it by walking north along the beach. Passing Cape Moreton, they followed the shore until they reached the South Passage, when they realized that they were on an island. They crossed the passage in a native canoe and were cared for by the natives at Amity Point. There they built a canoe of their own and paddled to Peel Island and finally to the mainland near Cleveland, where they abandoned their canoe. Now able to walk northwards again, they reached the mouth of the Brisbane River but were unable to cross it. They walked upstream in search of a canoe and eventually found one at Oxley Creek. After returning to the mouth of the river, they followed the shore of Moreton Bay to Clontarf Point on the Redcliffe Peninsula which they reached on 30 June.

Nothing further is known of them until their arrival at the southern end of Bribie Island; it will be argued that this was late in September. After staying with the natives for a month or so, they resumed their journey northwards, but Pamphlet and Finnegan each returned separately to Bribie, where they were found on 29 and 30 November, respectively, by John Oxley in the "Mermaid".

Between 1 and 5 December Finnegan accompanied Oxley on his exploration of the Brisbane River while Pamphlet remained on the "Mermaid" in Pumicestone Channel. All returned to Sydney on the "Mermaid".

Parsons had last been seen (by Finnegan) at Noosa. He continued travelling north, but eventually he also returned to Bribie, where he was found by Oxley in the "Amity" in September 1824.

The main sources

For almost 150 years the only major source of information on the castaways that has been generally available has been Barron Field's version. It is entitled "Narrative of Thomas Pamphlet aged thirty-five years, who was with two other men wrecked on the coast of New Holland on April, 1823, and lived among the natives for seven months. Taken down by John Uniacke."³ It will be referred to in this article as NTP.

Another source, hitherto unpublished, is printed below. The manuscript, which was donated to the Mitchell Library in 1952, is entitled "Narrative of white men, castaways on Moreton Island in 1823 — discover the Brisbane River — statement by Thomas Pamphlet." It will be referred to in this article as B1431, its reference number in the Mitchell Library. The final page of B1431, and a few words on other pages, are missing. In the text printed below, those parts have been supplied from NTP, and are printed in italics. The page numbers from B1431 are inserted in the text in square brackets, for future reference. The original spelling has been retained⁴, but punctuation, almost entirely lacking in B1431, has been supplied.

Narrative of White Men, Castaways on Moreton Island in 1823. Discover the Brisbane River

Statement by Thomas Pamphlet.

We left Sydney March 21st 1823 in a large open boat of twenty-nine feet overall and ten feet beam owned by William Farrel and Richard Parsons for the Five Islands about fifty miles south of Sydney to take in cedar⁵. Our crew consisted of Richard Parsons, John Finnegan, John Thompson and myself Thomas Pamphlet. We had a considerable quantity of provisions on board : flour and pork for the purpose of buying cedar with, besides four gallons of water and five gallons of rum. About 4 p.m. the same evening when within seven or eight miles of our destination a violent westerly gale came on, which forced us to lower sail [page 2] and keep the boat before the sea. The night came on with increasing wind and heavy rain but we did not lose sight of land until shut out by darkness. The gale continued with unabated violence for five days when it moderated, but the sea continued so high that we still had to keep the boat before it without being able to carry any sail until the eleventh day when we made sail, supposing we had drifted to the southward and that we were then off the coast of Vandiemans land. We had no compass but steered by the sun as well as we could guess a north-west course expecting soon to make land in the vicinity of the Five Islands. Our small stock of water was totally consumed on the second day and the rain water we caught in the commencement of the gale was so spoiled with salt water we were obliged to throw it away. Our sufferings [3] were dreadful for the next thirteen days, having nothing to drink but rum. We were almost unable to speak. John Thompson, a Scotchman, the best hand in the boat, an old man-of-war'sman became quite delirious from drinking salt water. On April 15th a heavy rain fell⁶; we caught about a bucket and a half water in a sail but it was almost useless, the sail had been so drenched with salt water. On the eighteenth day a light rain fell, when we caught a bucketful of good water. Thompson recovered a little on getting some of it but still continued severely purged and

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Facsimile of Barron Field.

(From Barron Field. — *First Fruits of Australian Poetry*. Sydney, Barm on the Hill, 1941.)

otherwise effected by the salt water he had drunk. We still continued steering to the south-west as we supposed till the nineteenth day⁷, when about eleven o'clock a.m. Finnegan, having gone up to the mast head, said that [4] he could see land ahead. We determined to steer for it, but towards evening lost sight of it. Thompson was very bad and John Finnegan had become quite deaf; it was with difficulty we could keep our watch of two hours each. We continued in this state until the twenty-first day when at daylight, it being my watch, I distinctly saw land ahead, which as the morning advanced appeared to be three or four islands. Thompson revived on hearing the news. We had been compelled to bind him hand and foot to stay him from jumping overboard, as he was completely deranged. His feet were now untied and he came aft thinking he was on shore and entreating us to give him water⁸. We were unable to comply with the request. Then, raveing incoherently he declared he had just been dining with his family in Scotland. He then lay down and in an hour he [5] expired. We steered for the land until about ten p.m. when we hove the boat to, expecting to make land in the morning. At daylight we could see natives round their fires on the shore and intended to keep clear of them. The next day about midnight the boat struck on a reef of rocks, but the heave of the sea carried her over it without damage, and when daylight broke we found we had drifted out of sight of land. Having a fine breeze we again steered for the land and by sunrise we were within two miles of the shore but were afraid to land on account of the natives who were on the shore⁹. We therefore kept on our course northward. The next morning the wind was light, the sea smooth. We could see running water on the beach. We proposed to take the boat close in, but Parsons, owner of the boat, being afraid of it being lost, we continued on our course. Towards evening [6] Parsons declared he was dying, that he must have water if the boat was lost. We therefore looked for a place to land,

but breakers prevented us, so we continued on under easy sail. Thompson's body, which had remained in the boat, now became offensive, so we determined to throw it overboard. We searched him and found his "ticket-of-leave" sewed up in his waistcoat. Parsons bound a handkerchief over his face and he was thrown overboard. We continued all that day running along shore northward; this was our twenty-fourth day out. Next morning Finnegan at the helm saw a bight ahead. We steered into it and anchored a quarter of a mile from the shore, payed out forty fathom of chain to let her drift in. I stripped, made the running rigging fast to the water keg to swim ashore with it. I was in the water one and a half hours before I landed. When landed I run to the water [7] and drunk like a horse. I returned to the beach, then run back to the water. I was so weak from the quantity of water I had drunk I was unable to fill the water keg. My companions called to me to come on board again. I was too weak to venture through the sea again. I called to them to cut the cable and run the boat in, which they did. As the boat grounded on the sandy beach her bottom stove in. My mates landed safely. I had brought a pint pot on shore to fill the keg with. Parsons emptied it thirteen times in succession. Finnegan lay down in the water and drank to that excess that his stomach would not retain it but threw it off again; this he repeated three or four times. We had all stripped to swim through the surf, so we were all naked, all our clothes lost. Low sand hills surrounded the beach¹⁰; no firewood on them, and we had no way of making fire. We lay down on the sand [8] to pass the night and it rained heavily and we suffered much from cold and hunger. Next morning we found two bags of flour on the beach¹¹, two totally destroyed, the third the salt water had only penetrated two inches into. We each took with us as much flour as we could carry away. We still imagined we were southward of Port Jackson. After making a wretched meal of flour and water which we mixed in a bucket that had drifted ashore, we set out along the beach in a northerly direction walking until near dark when we observed a native path striking into the bush¹², which we followed and came up to a native woman carrying water in a bark vessel. We concealed ourselves till she had passed on. There were several large huts near¹³, but the men were probably away fishing, as we did not see any. Further on near a native hut [9] a black boy was throwing spears at a crow. The boy noticed us and instantly ran into the hut, from which a man ran out, snatched up a spear and made off, followed by a woman with a child on her back. I called to the man, when to our astonishment he answered in good English, "What do you want — do you wish to kill us?" i.e., at this time no doubt Pamphlet was suffering from a degree of delirium¹⁴. We thought we were near some white settlement, which gave us great spirits. Finnegan went into this hut and got some fire. We proceeded, intending to stop at the next water we fell in with, which happened in about a mile, when we made some flour cakes and set them down to roast. While thus employed we saw a man's head peeping over the bank behind us. Soon two or three more appeared; we beckoned them to approach us, which after some time they did. We offered [10] them some cake which they pretended to eat, spiting it out again. Their numbers now amounted to twelve. They felt us about the breast and shoulders which greatly alarmed us, so we prepared to move on, but they urged us to return to the huts we had first seen. They had nets, and made signs they would catch fish for us. Finding we were determined to go on, they prepared to go with us, taking up our bags of flour to carry for us. In a mile we came to more huts into which they invited us to enter; on our consenting they began dancing and singing. They made a fire. When I lay down to sleep one of the natives lay near me to take care of me and keep up the fire. My companions went into the huts where every attention was shown to them. In the morning after

breakfasting on our cakes we again set out accompanied by our [11] kind friends, who brought us to the beach seeming anxious that we should return, but did not offer to use any kind of force. We determined to proceed to the north, supposing that course would lead us to Sydney. The natives still travelled with us. Proceeding about three miles we came to more huts. They again wished us to remain. After sitting with them an hour, we proceeded, much against their wish, one of them going with us. We walked along the beach passed more huts. At the last of them our guide left us. Pointing to a distance he made signs we should find a canoe. He took us to high ground, indicating a point of land at some distance¹⁵, which, as the place we were at seemed an island, we imagined was the main land. We proceeded until 4 p.m. Finding a deserted hut with water near, we passed the night [12] at it, also the following day. Then proceeding on we walked the beach for five days without meeting natives, helping out our flour with cockles and other shell fish. On the fifth day we reached a high sandy point where our progress was stopped by a channel about three miles wide¹⁶, the tide running rapidly through it. We now knew we were on an island, and wished to reach the main land. We passed the night there. Observing fires on the opposite shore, we made a large one on the beach. The natives noticed it, and one of them came over in a large canoe. When he had hauled up his canoe he came towards our fire. No sooner did he observe our colour than he ran back to his canoe and, jumping in, pushed off, shouting loudly. Another canoe was launched from the opposite shore with two men in it, who met the first in mid [13] channel. Both canoes came toward the place where we were sitting quietly by our fires. The three men then cautiously approached and examined us at a distance, then returned to their canoes, made signals with pieces of bark to those on the opposite shore, when two more canoes pushed out with five or six men in each. When landed, the whole party of fourteen approached. They were quite naked, no weapons of any kind with them. They were shy of us. At last one man came close, making signs. The whole party then formed a circle round us. Their beards were very long. Parsons had a pair of scissors. He commenced cutting them, which greatly pleased them. They remained an hour with us. When they were going we got our bags on our backs to go with them. Seeing this, they ran to the canoes. We tried to secure one but they were too [14] quick for us. We spent the night at some deserted huts. Next morning when we returned to the point we were rejoiced to see a large canoe lying on the beach with no one near it. On looking round we saw two natives going to where our boat had been lost. We now found we had walked round the island. They did not notice us, so we examined the canoe. Finding it would not carry us all, I agreed to remain behind and let Parsons and Finnegan cross over; agreeing one should return to fetch me, they pushed off. I ascended a hill to watch them cross. As they landed, natives walked out into the water to meet them. When they had landed the whole crowd got round them and moved into the bush which at last hid them from sight. I returned to the native wells, made a fire and passed a lonely night. In the morning I returned to the beach and made a large fire in hope that [15] seeing it the canoe would return. I began to lament my hard fate being left alone in this desolate place, where after the little flour I had expended I should perish from hunger or hostility of the natives. Next morning I found that a large cask on the beach that had drifted in from some vessel. I set to work to get some of the hoops off and found to my disappointment it contained six other casks, one inside the other. I was proceeding up the hill again when I saw the canoe putting off again with two persons in it, who proved to be Finnegan and one of the natives. On landing the [native] went off with his nets on his shoulders, but made signs to me to go back

with Finnegan, who told me they had been treated kindly and given as much fish as they could eat. The tide was running out of the channel. I wanted Finnegan to pull along shore or wait till the tide slackened, but he decided [16] to pull straight across. As soon as we left the shore the current took us out to sea. We paddled for an hour and a half and drifted close to the breakers; having no hope of the canoe living if it got among them, we redoubled our efforts but to no purpose; we were soon in the midst of them. But to our surprise the canoe rode it out better than a larger boat would have done. We got clear out into the open sea and safely reached the opposite shore. The natives, and Parsons in the midst of them, received us on the beach with many demonstrations of joy after our five hours of hard pulling. They lifted the canoe out of the water and carried it into the bush, gave us a meal of roasted fish and took us to their huts. They placed us in a large hut by ourselves and supplied us with fish and water liberally, and we remained with them [17] for ten days¹⁷. They would not, however, allow us to go near the huts where their women were for five or six days. At night several of the younger men slept in front of our hut. Having recovered our strength, Parsons and I resolved to try to reach Sydney. Finnegan was not inclined to go. He said the blacks were friendly and he wished to remain with them sooner than attempt the dangers of trying to reach the settlements, but at length he consented to go with us. We set out in a westerly direction to get round the large bay of which the island we had been cast upon forms the eastern boundary. We had saved about forty pounds of flour, the greater part of which Parsons carried. Finnegan carried the rest and a fire stick, while I bore an axe and a tin pot we had saved from the wreck. The natives [18] pointed to an inlet that appeared about fourteen miles distant, and by signs informed us we should find a canoe there, in which to cross to an island at the bottom of the bay¹⁸. As we travelled along, the fire stick went out, at which Parsons, who was a passionate man, decided to kill Finnegan, and struck him a severe blow with the axe. He would have murdered him if I had not interfered. Finnegan begged for mercy and said he would run back quickly to a place where we had passed a native fire. Succeeding in freshening it up we stopped there an hour, hoping Finnegan would appear, but on approach of evening we returned to where we had left our stock of flour. We set forward, each carrying a fire stick this time lest one should fail us, but just

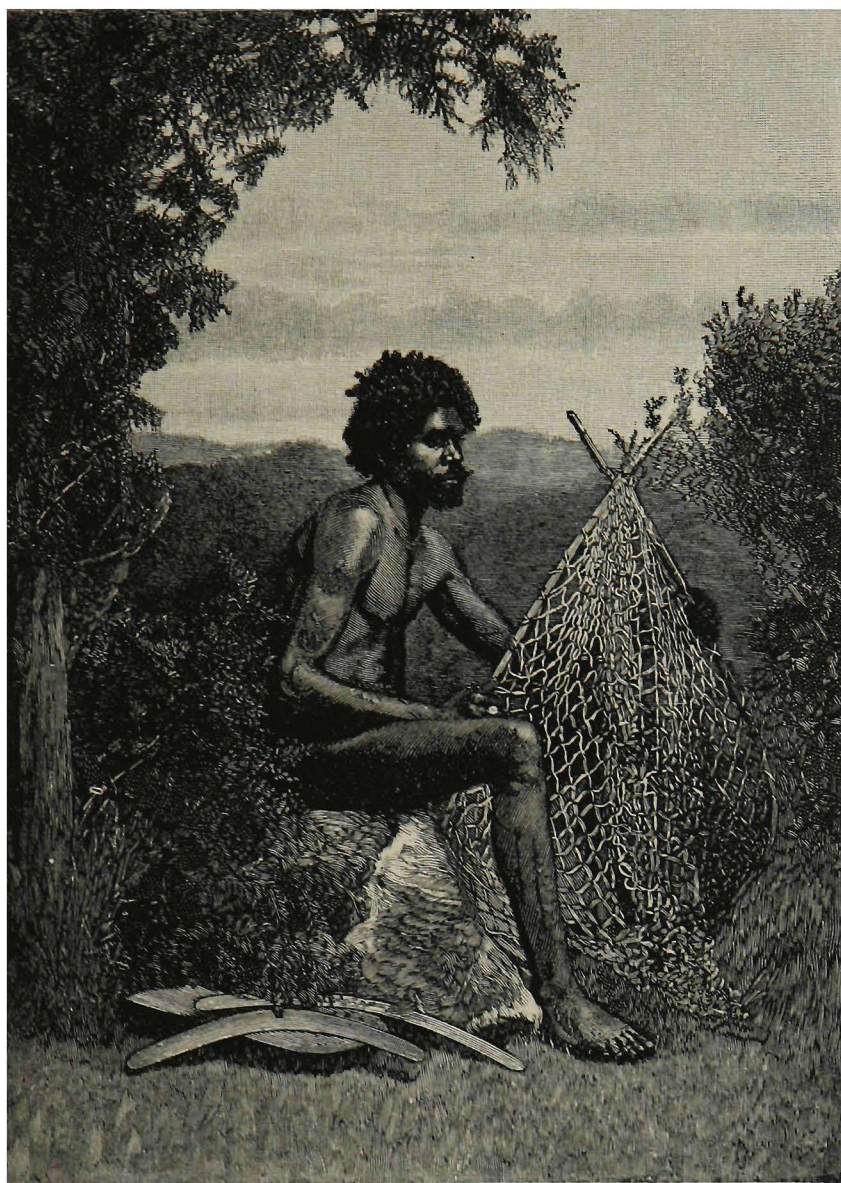


The finding of Pamphlet.

(From A. Garran, ed. — *Picturesque Atlas of Australasia*, Vol. II. Sydney, Picturesque Atlas Publishing Co., 1886. p. 316.)

as we reached the place both firesticks went out. We then agreed to take [19] part of our flour back to the native fire. The night was far advanced when we reached it the second time. Having made a cake and eaten it we lay down to rest. In the morning we baked another cake and after waiting three hours for Finnegan to come we again walked to the place where we had left the remainder of our flour, taking two large firesticks. We now concluded Finnegan had returned to the natives, so we pushed on to where the natives had told us we should find the canoe. We got to the place about 4 p.m. Too tired to look for the canoe that night, we found water, made a cake, and slept there that night. We now took the precaution to light fires as we went along. Next morning we found the canoe exactly where the natives had told us¹⁹. We took it down to the water. It had been so long exposed to the heat of the sun it had opened in several places and would [20] not float. This was a dreadful disappointment. The beach at this place was so thick with mangroves we could not follow it, and without shoes we were unable to walk through the bush, so we decided on going back to the natives, especially as we expected to find Finnegan with them. So we took our flour and set out on our return. By night fall we were within three or four miles of their huts; finding a fire and fresh water we rested for the night. Next morning the tide being high prevented us walking the beach. We therefore stayed till low water when just as we were about to start we saw Finnegan and two natives coming towards us. These men had left their nets at the place where we had found the canoe. They were afraid lest we should take them away. They had brought Finnegan with them that we might not hurt them, but as soon as they saw us they [21] made signs for him to return with us. This, however, we would not allow, for we were resolved to have no more to do with him, so we made him proceed with the natives to the canoe, we going in the direction towards their huts where we had lived before. About half a mile before we reached them we saw the natives fishing. They had been very successful and on seeing us they immediately put a quantity of whiteings on the fire, nor would they allow us to proceed till we had filled ourselves with them. They then conducted us to our old quarters²⁰, and, having kindled a fire, left us some fish and went out to catch more. We set about making ourselves comfortable. At nightfall we were surprised by the return of the two blacks and Finnegan with the nets; they had travelled the distance in one day that it had taken us three days to perform and had forced him [22] to keep up with them. He was dreadfully fatigued but his two companions after leaving him went out to procure fish and fern root for him and for themselves. We now became reconciled to Finnegan and where all of us friendly as ever, resting ourselves for the next three days in the huts, when the blacks regularly brought us fish and fern roots, which latter they call "dingowa". We now consulted whether we had better take one of their canoes by night, or make one ourselves. Having decided on the latter we made choice of a tree and set about the work of to cut it down and form the canoe. We worked from sunrise to sunset for three weeks, having no other tool but the hatchet. During the whole time the natives brought us food to where we were at work and likewise left fish at our huts. During the whole of this time Finnegan refused to work with [23] us, which the blacks observing frequently took the axe out of our hands and offered it to him, making signs to him that he should use it, and on his refusing to do so no longer brought him food, though to us they continued a liberal supply. He was consequently obliged to procure fern roots for himself. At the expiration of three weeks, our canoe being completed, the natives would not allow us to launch it but did it themselves, and when they saw it afloat with Parsons and me in it their joy and admiration knew no bounds. They leaped, danced and roared, following

us up and down the beach. Being satisfied it would serve our purpose we landed. The natives rolled the canoe up again on the beach, not allowing us to touch it. The remainder of the evening was spent in making preparations for our departure, Finnegan still refusing to go with us notwithstanding our entreaties [24] that he would do so. The natives having given us a supply of fish, Parsons and I set out the next afternoon with the flood tide. We had not proceeded more than a quarter of a mile when the natives, seeing that Finnegan was not going with us, hastily launched a canoe, and two of them having got into it, the rest forced him to follow, when they paddled quickly towards us. But we had got round a sandbank that lay some distance from the shore; they therefore pulled to the bank and landed him on it, where they left him and paddled back to the huts. As he was unable to swim he would have been drowned when the tide rose if we had [not] pulled back for him as we immediately did. Being once more all together we made the best of our way to the island before mentioned²¹, to which the blacks had advised us to steer, and about eleven o'clock [25] at night we reached it. We immediately secured the canoe and made a good fire, which was scarcely done when it began to rain and did so incessantly all night. The next morning the rain cleared off and we proceeded to the other side of the island with the canoe to procure fern roots and cross to the other side of the bay. The tide being strong, we did not reach the opposite shore till after dark²², where we found six or seven huts and some fire. We could hear the natives, who appeared to have just left this place, making much noise to the southward where they were fishing, but they did not come near us that night. The next morning we went up to a rising ground at the back of the huts, from which we could get a clear view of the country; from this place we saw another point far to the northward, but the distance appeared so great and the [26] shore receded so far we were afraid to venture across in our canoe. We therefore returned to the huts, and having drawn up our canoe on the beach, set out to walk round the bay. The mangroves were so thick we could not keep along the shore but followed a native path. On the third day we arrived at a large river at a place where the natives used to cross²³, but it was too wide for us to attempt to swim and we could not find a canoe. So we resolved to go up the river until we could find some means to cross, but we went on travelling for nearly a month, being impeded by numerous salt creeks which we walked round, neither of my companions being able to swim sufficiently well to attempt crossing them. At last we reached the bank of a creek on the opposite side of which we saw two canoes²⁴; [27] one of these I resolved to procure. I swam across, but was so weak, having lived for a month on fern root, that it was with difficulty I reached the other side. I loosed the canoe and brought it back to my companions. It was so small it would not carry more than two, so I took Parsons over first and then returned for Finnegan, but we found the bush so thick it was impossible for us, naked and shoeless as we were, to travel it, so we returned to the place we had left. We then commenced our return the way we had come, but we had not the difficulties we had in coming up since when we came to a river or creek, instead of travelling seven or eight days to get round it, we were enabled to cross it in the canoe. We thus continued for three days, Parsons and Finnegan walking and I paddling down in the canoe [28] till on the opposite side of the river we found another canoe. Being now all able to float down the river, we agreed to rest where we were for a few days and lay in a stock of fern root. While thus employed we fell in with a party of blacks who were going to fish. On our asking them they gave us a good meal of fish, but the next day seemed anxious for us to leave them, and on our not doing so as readily as they wished, made an attempt to seize our canoes. We were



Blackfellow mending net.

(From A. Garran, ed. — *Picturesque Atlas of Australasia*, Vol. II. p. 349.)

fortunate enough however to get them out of their reach and proceed on our journey. In two days after, we reached the mouth of the river when on a sand bank at the entrance I was lucky enough to catch five large stinging rays which afforded us some good meals. The river as high up as we reached was brackish and a strong tide runs in it, and it was a [29] quarter of a mile wide where we turned back. We now left the smaller canoe and my companions walked along the beach while I in the canoe paddled along it. In this way we continued our course northward for three days, and on the evening of the third day reached the point originally indicated to us by the blacks on the island where our boat was lost²⁵. This was the 101st day since we left Sydney²⁶. Parsons and I kept a strict account thus far, but from this time forward we totally lost our reckoning. I had brought Parsons across the last bay in the canoe and promised to go back for Finnegan, but he having walked a little further along the shore found a canoe in which were twenty or thirty large fish. This he immediately seized and we had scarcely landed when we observed him paddling towards us. On his approach he called out to us to make a good fire as [30] he had plenty of fish, upon which we ran down to the shore, and as soon as he had landed, having hauled up the canoe, we carried the fish to some empty huts near by. In the mean time the natives who owned the canoe began to call out and follow Finnegan across, to the number of ten. By this time the natives of

the side on which we were, being alarmed by the noise, had joined the others and they all came towards the huts. We had now lived for several weeks almost entirely on fern roots which, being a poor kind of food, together with the fatigue of travelling so far under a burning sun without clothes, had weakened and emaciated us very much; so we resolved to run every risk sooner than lose the fish we had obtained. We therefore hid them under some bark and I took my axe and Finnegan a stick, being determined not to lose [31] them without a struggle. However when the natives came close they seemed to pity our miserable condition and instead of trying to repossess themselves of the fish, some who had nets set to work to procure more for us and also brought us much dingowa. The next night they took us to their huts where they treated us in the same hospitable manner as the blacks had with whom we had lived at the first²⁷.

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Narration continued by John Finnegan, Pamphlet being sick

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We resided with these blacks five days²⁸, when Pamphlet, having gone out fishing with them, said he had seen the head of Jervis Bay, and proposed to go to it; he said he thought the distance was about fifteen miles. The next day Parsons, who had [32] several times attempted to kill me, consented to go with him, so I resolved to remain where I was till I had fairly gotten rid of him, and then to travel by myself. They set out the following day and I stayed behind with the chief of the tribe who had been kind to me ever since our arrival here. Parsons and Pamphlet returned in the evening, being unable to procure food, and we all remained at the huts for a month, during which time we were distributed in various huts among the natives, the old chief always keeping me with him, while all the tribe contributed to our support, one bringing fish, another dingowa, and so on. At the end of a month we again got anxious to get home and resolved to make one more effort. Having collected fish and dingowa we set out one afternoon along the beach for a place ten miles distant. We had just made our [33] fire when four of the blacks with whom we had been living came up with us and entreated us to return with them. We imagined they followed us in consequence of our having promised them the axe, which we had not given them; that probably more of their tribe would arrive before morning. We therefore drove them off and next day resumed our journey. In the course of the day we met a black man and woman of the tribe we had left who also wished us to return. After travelling with us for a mile, they struck off into the bush and left us. Towards evening we came to a river too considerable for us to cross²⁹. We rested on the bank of it that night, and next morning went up it about a mile; here we found a canoe, and brought it down to the place where we had slept, and in the afternoon crossed the river in it, and rested on the other bank that night. [34] Next morning we continued on our way, and in the course of the day fell in with another small river on the bank of which were a number of huts³⁰. Here we found an old blackfellow who was unable to move his arms or his legs, they having been broken at some distant period and had never been set. There were with him several women and children eating fish with which on our arrival they at once supplied us. We stopped with them for three days when, observing a woman crossing the river at low tide, we did the same and proceeded on our journey. The same day we fell in with another river³¹, up the banks of which we walked two days; the second evening met some natives among whom we [were] surprised to see a man belonging to the tribe among whom we had tarried so long. He was one

of the four that had followed us the day we left them. This man, when we first arrived [35] among his tribe, was laid up with a spear wound in his knee, and was cured by Pamphlet, to whom he was much attached. He entreated Pamphlet to return with him; to this, Pamphlet, whose feet become extreemly sore, at last consented. His friend was on his way to a great meeting of natives, where he was to fight the man that wounded him. Next morning Pamphlet and he set out for the fight, while Parsons and I pursued our journey. The next day we crossed the river and traveled for two days longer, when on reaching the bank of another river a quarrel arose between Parsons and me, on which he opened his knife and swore he would murder me³². I then run into the bush and he followed me, but I succeeded in getting away from him and travelled quickly up the bank of the river till evening. At nightfall met a party of blacks crossing [36] the river in three canoes, and made them understand by signs I wished to cross too. This they would not allow, but made me turn back with a fishing black and his wife, who after four days brought me to the place from whence I had first set out. Here I found Pamphlet, and was again received by the old cheif with the greatest kindness, for he was delighted at my return.

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Narrative resumed by Pamphlet

* * *

The day following Finnegan's return the old cheif, being about to go with several of his tribe to a fight at some distance³³, took Finnegan with him. He was verry anxious allso for me to go with him, but on my makeing signs that my feet were sore, he permitted me to remain behind without [37] further solicitation. I now daily accompanied the men of the tribe in their fishing work and was allways supplied by them in the most liberal manner. They would not even allow me to roast the fish or pound the dingowa which they gave me, but allways brought them ready dressed. One day, however, the old man in whos hut I lived, haveing caught several large fish, did not give me any, as was usual with him; and on my asking for some, he refused me. Fancying they might be getting tired of me I resolved to leave them; takeing my axe I set out once more in order, if possible, to join Parsons. I had not gone far when I was followed by four of the young men, who made use of every persuasion to entice me back, to which I at last consented, the more readily as each of them had brought two spears, [38] and I was not ceertain how they might use them if I persisted in my refusal. After this I lived with them in the same manner as before, expecting Finnegan's return every day. But haveing now lost our reckoning for some time I cannot form any idea how long I remained, or what time Finnegan was away. At last, one evening as I was sitting by the fire and the blacks where roasting fish for me I heard natives shouting on the beach and calling me. I walked slowly towards them, but what was my astonishment and delight when I saw a cutter under full sail standing up the bay about *three* miles from where we stood. I instantly made towards her with all the speed I could, followed by a number of natives. Before I had run half the distance she had come to an anchor within half a quarter [39] of a mile from the shore. On comeing abreast the vessel I hailed her and was immediately awnsered and shortly after a boat pushed off from her which landed Mr Oxley the Surveyor-General of New South Wales, Lieutenant Stirling of "the Buffs" and Mr J. Uniacke super cargo of H.M. cutter "Mermaid"³⁴. I now learned to my great surprise that I was at least five hundred miles to the northward of Port Jackson, instead of being to the south of Jervis Bay, as I imagined. I was taken on board the vessel that evening, when, after I was cleaned

I was decently *clothed and* humanely treated. *But my head and heart were so much affected by this unexpected turn of fortune that I was unable to answer any questions that were put to me that night.* The next morning I became more collected and [40] in the course of the day my satisfaction was greatly increased by the return of Finnegan, who experienced the same kind treatment that I had previously done. I now found that upwards of eight months had elapsed since I left Sydney; consequently, I had spent nearly five of them with these hospitable natives of Moreton Bay. Their behaviour to me and my companions had been so invariably kind and generous, that, notwithstanding the delight I felt at the idea of once more returning to my home, I did not leave them without sincere regret. Mr Oxley and Mr Stirling set out the following morning, taking Finnegan with them, in order to examine the river which we had been so long in attempting to cross³⁵; and on their return, in five or six days, the "Mermaid" cutter got under way, and we all set sail for Sydney.

The authorship of B1431

It is tempting to identify the author of B1431 with John Uniacke, mentioned in NTP as the recorder of the narrative. However, there is no external evidence for this; it has not even been possible to identify the handwriting, as there seems to be no verified example of Uniacke's handwriting in existence. The question of the authorship of B1431 must be answered from its internal evidence.

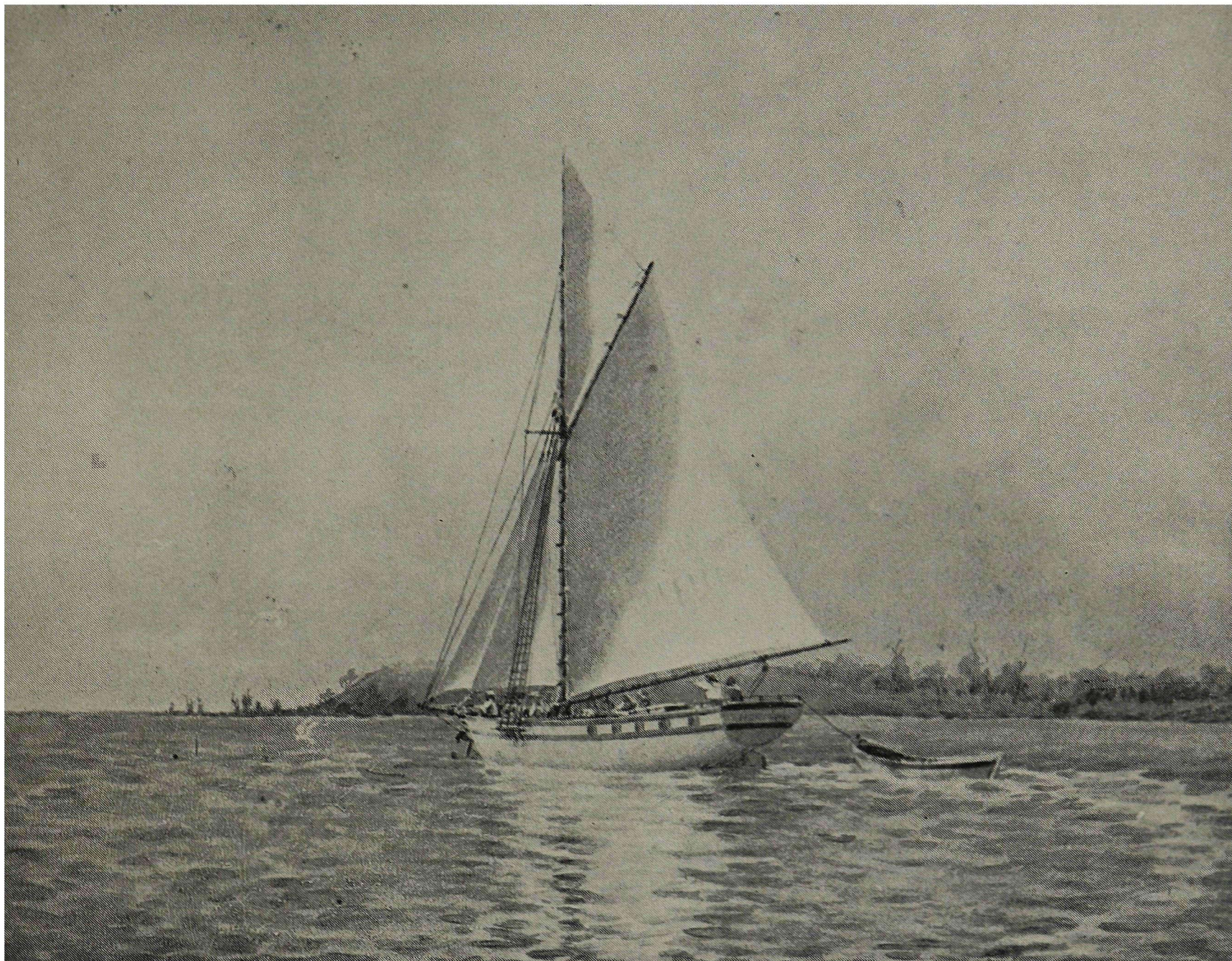
The documents B1431 and NTP are so similar that one of them must have been adapted from the other, or else they were both adapted from a third document. As a third document is not known to exist, and subsequent reasoning shows that it is unnecessary to assume such a document, the more likely assumption will be made, that NTP was adapted from B1431 or *vice versa*.

If NTP is the earlier source, two things are hard to explain. Firstly, B1431 contains many errors in spelling and grammar, and is almost entirely lacking in punctuation. By contrast, NTP is free of such errors and has a polished, sophisticated style. It is most unlikely that any writer of the period would have wished to erase the polish of NTP or that he could have succeeded to the extent shown in B1431. Secondly, many factual details in NTP are not given in B1431. If B1431 is an adaption of NTP, the principle of selection of the material from NTP is erratic, and in any case the operation would have required more literary skill than the writer of B1431 appears to have possessed.

So far, then, it seems unlikely that NTP is the earlier document. B1431, however, contains several errors which are not in NTP. Some of these may have been introduced into B1431 during transcription from an earlier, more accurate, document which may or may not have been NTP.

On the assumption that B1431 is the earlier version, it is easy to explain the improvement in spelling and style in NTP as being due to Barron Field. The details in NTP which are additional to B1431 can be explained by postulating that Field interviewed Pamphlet and Finnegan. The fact that NTP is free of certain errors that exist in B1431 can also be explained in terms of an interview with the castaways.

It will now be taken for granted that NTP was adapted from B1431. It is considered, for reasons given later in this article, that B1431 is not the first draft written by Uniacke on the "Mermaid", but it could well be a redraft composed by Uniacke after his return to Sydney. If anyone other than Uniacke had redrafted the narrative, they would probably have corrected the spelling errors and the lack of punctuation. It will therefore be assumed that B1431 is the work of Uniacke himself.



H.M. Cutter "Mermaid".

(Watercolour by P. Stanhope Hobday, by courtesy of The Royal Queensland Historical Society, Newstead House.)

Uniacke

John Fitzgerald Uniacke (1798-1825) was the son of the member for Younghall in the Irish House of Commons. His mother was a niece of the first Marquis of Waterford. At the time of his visit to Moreton Bay he was Superintendent of Distilleries in New South Wales, at a salary of £775 per annum³⁶.

In 1823 Uniacke accompanied Oxley and Stirling on an expedition to Port Curtis and Moreton Bay in search of a site for a penal settlement. He had probably, like Oxley and Stirling, been appointed to the expedition by Governor Brisbane. In B1431 he is designated as "super cargo of H.M. cutter 'Mermaid' ", that is, treasurer and storekeeper for the expedition. He was evidently a naturalist, for, in his journal³⁷, he mentioned that he "collected specimens of minerals on Facing Island for the Governor"³⁸, and that he stayed at Pumicestone Channel "to shoot rare birds" and to make observations of the natives.

On 23 June 1824, Uniacke was appointed Sheriff and Provost Master of New South Wales. He died of a fever in Sydney on 13 January 1825. After his death, his effects (including perhaps the manuscript B1431) were sold by public auction.

Recording the castaways' story

At the time of their rescue Pamphlet and Finnegan were too excited to give a complete account of their adventure. After questioning them, Oxley included a brief outline of their story in his field books on 29 and 30 November³⁹, and Uniacke wrote some details in his journal.

While Oxley, Stirling and Finnegan were exploring the Brisbane River between 1 and 5 December, Uniacke probably began to write down Pamphlet's story. Oxley named the Brisbane River on 4 December, and the "Mermaid" sailed for Sydney on 6 December. They experienced a severe gale off Cape Moreton on 7 December.

Towards the end of the narrative, it was "continued by John Finnegan, Pamphlet being sick". As this must have occurred after Finnegan's return to the ship on 5 December, it is probable that Pamphlet's sickness was caused by rough seas during the gale of 7 December. Pamphlet resumed the story for the final part of the narrative.

The gap in the narrative

Pamphlet's narrative describes the events that took place until the castaways arrived at Clontarf Point on the Redcliffe Peninsula on the 101st day after they had left Sydney. That was 30 June.

It was at this point in narrating the story that Pamphlet became ill and the narration was continued by Finnegan. Unfortunately Finnegan took up the story from the time of their arrival at Bribie, with the result that the journey from Redcliffe to Bribie was never recorded.

This mistake by Finnegan was characteristic. On several occasions he revealed a lack of wisdom, for example, in insisting on rowing across the South Passage when the tide was running out, and by stealing a canoe full of fish from the natives. His unreliability was shown when he failed to return to his companions after promising to bring them fire, and when (during Oxley's excursion to explore the Brisbane River) he led Oxley up the Pine River by mistake. So it is not surprising that Finnegan made the mistake that left a serious gap in the narrative. One thing, however, should be said in his favour: he seems to have had a better memory than Pamphlet in estimating lengths of time immediately prior to their rescue.

The manuscript B1431

The general neatness of the manuscript suggests that it does not represent the actual pages upon which Uniacke wrote in the "Mermaid". There are very few corrections and there is no hint of the rough weather experienced on 7 December. Further, the name "Brisbane River" (unknown to Uniacke until the return of Oxley on 5 December) was probably not part of the title in the earliest draft. No doubt Uniacke made many improvements to the appearance and style of the narrative when he wrote out the manuscript B1431.

The defects in spelling and punctuation in B1431 must be attributed to Uniacke. Spelling errors which occur more than once include: where (were), loose (lose), theses (these), untill, allso, verry, cheif and haveing.

Grammatical errors were probably due to the castaways; for example, "I run to the water and drunk like a horse". Some of the language, however, seems to be more appropriate to the literary fashion of polite society than to the spoken words of the illiterate castaways. For example, "they received us on the beach with many demonstrations of joy", and "my head and my heart were so much affected by this unexpected turn of fortune". Uniacke evidently paraphrased the castaways' story, either when he first wrote it down, or when he redrafted it as B1431.

The language and subject matter were later to be more thoroughly revised by Barron Field.

Field

Barron Field (1786-1846) was a son of Henry Field, surgeon and apothecary. In England he became known as a literary and theatrical critic and he was a close friend of Charles Lamb. He was appointed as a judge of the Supreme Court of New South Wales in 1816, and his annual income from salary and court fees is estimated at about £2000. He edited *First Fruits of Australian Poetry*, published in Sydney in 1819. He resigned his position in 1824 and returned to England, where he edited the *Geographical Memoirs of New South Wales*, published in London in 1825⁴⁰.

In this work, he revised the manuscripts to make them read better (in his estimation), and added further facts and explanatory details. His methods are illustrated in his treatment of Oxley's report on the 1823 expedition⁴¹. This report, dated 10 January 1824, exists in the form of an original manuscript in the National Library of Australia⁴². Field evidently used a manuscript copy of this, filed with Governor's Despatches in the Mitchell Library⁴³. He reproduced the errors of this latter manuscript.

He amplified some details, however, without indicating that he had added to the text. For example, the manuscript refers to a journal that Oxley submitted with his report; Field's version identifies this journal with Uniacke's "Narrative of Mr Oxley's expedition", otherwise referred to in this article as Uniacke's journal.

In his treatment of Pamphlet's narrative, Field used B1431 as a basis, but rewrote parts of it extensively.

NTP and B1431 compared

As the editor of NTP, Field improved upon both the literary and historical qualities of B1431.

In polishing B1431, Field not only corrected the spelling and introduced punctuation; he also made it more wordy and florid. "Quickly" in B1431 became "with great expedition" in NTP, while "told us" became "had given us to understand". Sometimes changes were made in the interests of intelligibility, having his readers in mind: "chain" (originally used in the nautical sense) was changed to "cable", "white settlement" became "English settlement", and in the title, instead of "Moreton Island" he put "the coast of New Holland".

As to historical improvements, it seems certain that Field questioned Pamphlet and Finnegan about facts in B1431 that appeared to be in error, and encouraged them to provide certain other facts and explanations. His experience as a judge no doubt assisted him to elicit the information he wanted. Factual discrepancies between NTP and B1431 are listed in Table I. In every case the change seems to have been deliberate, and in most cases the change could not have been made without the assistance of the castaways.

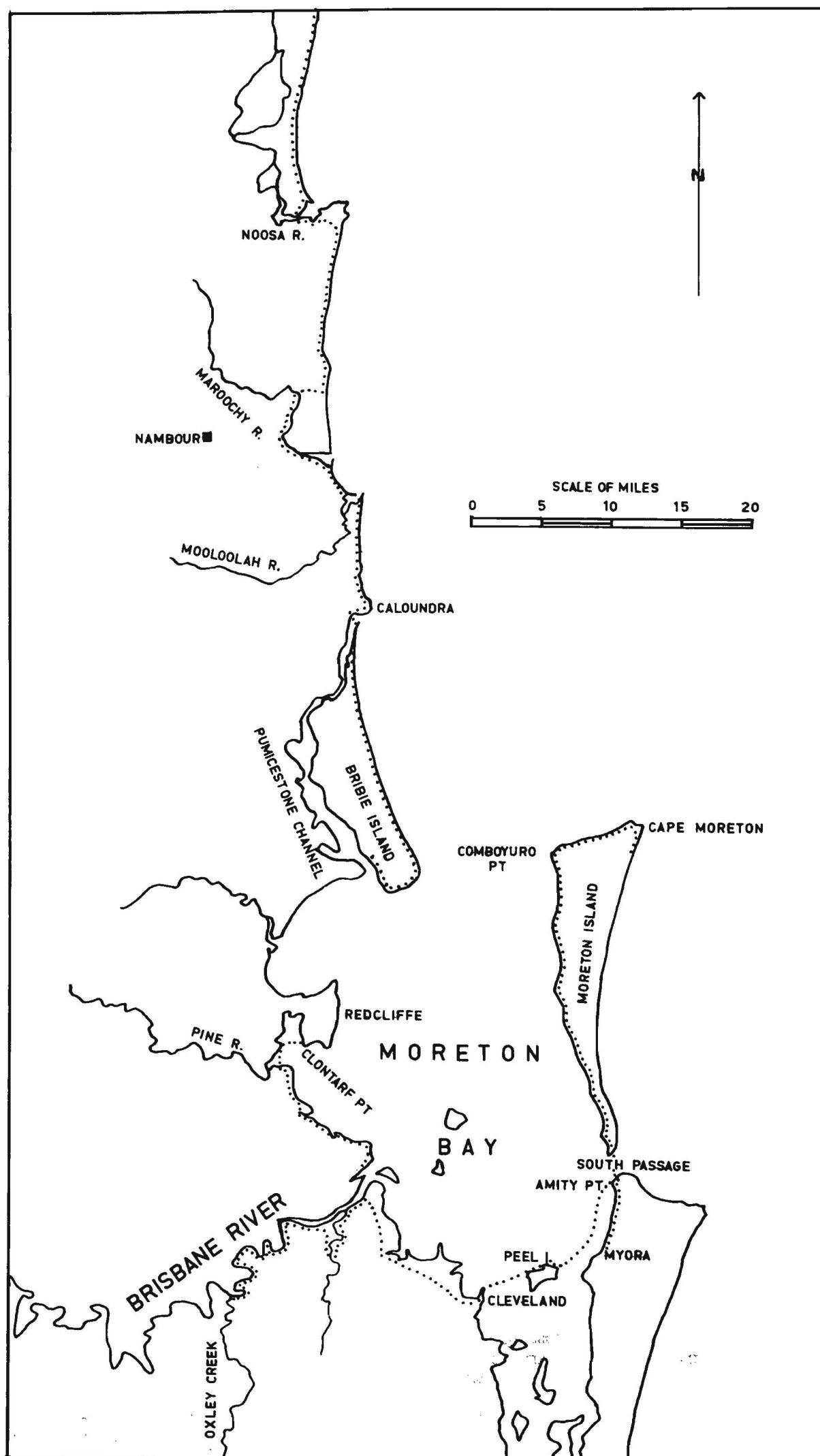
Table I Discrepancies between NTP and B1431		
	B1431	NTP
p. 3	April 15th	the fifteenth day
p. 3	south-west	N.W.
p. 4	thinking he was on shore	imagining we had already been on shore
p. 5	sunrise	sunset
p. 8	two bags	three bags
p. 32	in the evening	next morning

As for additional material in NTP, much of it could only have been supplied by the castaways. For example, B1431 states "Finnegan, haveing gone up to the mast head, said he could see land ahead". NTP essentially repeats this, and adds "which he declared to be the headland of Port Stephen, he having formerly worked there; but not being able to credit him, I went up to the mast-head myself, and, after looking earnestly for some time, was unable to determine whether it was land or a cloud". This additional information was probably supplied by both Pamphlet and Finnegan.

This distribution of the additional material in NTP is very uneven. In the first half of NTP, about 22 per cent of the text consists of additional material. However, in the second half, practically nothing additional has been inserted; an exception is the short section originally narrated by Finnegan, in which about 10 per cent of the material is additional. It appears that only Finnegan assisted in revising the second half, and then only for his own section of it. This explains why the gap in the narrative, which occurs in the second half of NTP, was not discovered by Pamphlet or corrected by Field.

The last page of the manuscript B1431 has been lost, and for this part of the narrative we are dependent on NTP alone. However, the last few pages of B1431 that exist have been reproduced very faithfully in NTP, with quite trivial alterations. It is therefore safe to assume that NTP also reproduces the vanished page fairly accurately.

Some errors and omissions occur in NTP. Two will be mentioned here:



Map of route taken by Pamphlet, Finnegan and Parsons.

Dotted line represents journey taken by the three castaways.

(1) Describing the place where the castaways landed on Moreton Island, B1431 has "low sand hills surrounded the beach" but NTP renders it as "the beach on which we landed was a low sand, surrounded by sandhills". Field has omitted the fact that the sandhills were low. Some historians, using NTP alone, have concluded erroneously that these sandhills were the great sand dunes at the southern end of the island.

(2) Field inserted dates, in parentheses, in places where B1431 gave merely the number of days after the departure from Sydney on 21 March. But he seems to have miscalculated; he identified the eleventh day with 2 April, whereas it was actually 1 April. He perpetuated this error until the twenty-fourth day, when he ceased inserting dates. Since the twenty-fourth day was actually 14 April, the date of the landing on Moreton Island was 15 April.

Minor sources

Two minor sources have already been mentioned: Oxley's field books and Uniacke's journal. Both these sources give a brief outline of the castaways' story, including a few details not to be found in B1431 or NTP. However, in these sources, Pamphlet's estimates of time are not consistent. For example, in estimating the time during which Finnegan had been absent from Bribie just prior to 29 November, Pamphlet originally told Oxley it was three or four weeks and he told Uniacke it was two weeks, whereas a week later he stated in his narrative that he had no idea how long it was. In the chronological discussion below, Pamphlet's estimates of time will be disregarded if the estimate was made immediately after his rescue.

When Uniacke's journal was published in *Geographical Memoirs of New South Wales*, under the title "Narrative of Mr Oxley's expedition", two descriptions of native fights were added to it. These fights took place in November 1823, at Nambour and Redcliffe, and were witnessed by Pamphlet and Finnegan respectively. They were probably narrated to Uniacke soon after the main story had been recorded. They are of considerable value, not only for the information concerning the natives, but also in making possible a reconstruction of the movements of the castaways during November.

The activities of Parsons up to the time of his rescue in September 1824 are described in *The Australian*, 21 October 1824, in Oxley's field book⁴⁴, and Cunningham's journal⁴⁵.

The chronology

The dates on which various events occurred can be deduced or estimated, and Table II contains a reconstruction of the chronology of the castaways' adventures from the time they landed on Moreton Island until the time they were located by Oxley. Information has been taken from the major sources and the two accounts of native fights.

Exact dates can be deduced from 15 April, when they landed on Moreton Island, to 27 April, when Pamphlet arrived at Amity Point. After that, some periods are treated in detail while others are given as "a week or ten days", "nearly three weeks", and "nearly a month". The only day that can be calculated exactly is the 101st day after leaving Sydney, 30 June, when they arrived at Clontarf Point. In order to fit in the intervening events, it is necessary to assume that some of the above periods were over-stated. In the table, the period of "nearly three weeks" spent in building a canoe has been taken as correct, but the period of "nearly a month", spent travelling up the bank of the Brisbane River to Oxley Creek, is assumed to have been only sixteen days; this seems reasonable enough, even allowing for the fact that time was lost in crossing creeks.

Owing to the gap in the narrative, it is necessary to work out later dates by counting back from the date on which Finnegan was rescued (30 November). Immediately prior to his rescue, Finnegan had been attending the native fight at Redcliffe, and his story of this fight suggests that he was absent

from Bribie for about nine days. Finnegan left on this trip on the day following his return from the north. Finnegan and Pamphlet had set out northwards on the same day, and Finnegan's story of this excursion accounts for fifteen days, while Pamphlet appears to have been away for nineteen days. As Finnegan arrived back at Bribie later than Pamphlet, it is assumed that he was away about nineteen days. The northern excursion began about a month after an earlier attempt to go north, which was about five days after their first arrival at Bribie. Table II shows that, on the basis of the above selection of facts, the gap in the narrative corresponds to the months of July August and September.

Table II
Chronology

April	15	Landed on Moreton Island
	16	Camped with natives north of Cape Moreton
	17	Camped near Comboyuro Point
	18	Rested
	19	Walked down west coast of Moreton Island
	20	
	21	
	22	
	23	Arrived at South Passage "on the fifth day"
	24	Natives from Amity Point visited them
	25	Parsons and Finnegan crossed South Passage
	26	
	27	Pamphlet crossed South Passage
	28	Remained at Amity Point "a week or ten days"
	29	
	30	
May	1	
	2	
	3	
	4	
	5	
	6	
	7	Walked south "about the tenth day"
	8	Arrived at Myora
	9	Turned back
	10	Arrived at Amity Point again
	11	Rested "three days"
	12	
	13	
	14	Building a canoe "for nearly three weeks"
	15	
	16	
	17	
	18	
	19	
	20	
	21	
	22	
	23	
	24	
	25	
	26	
	27	
	28	
	29	
	30	
	31	
June	1	
	2	Finished building canoe
	3	Crossed to Peel Island in canoe
	4	Crossed to mainland in canoe
	5	Walked northwards
	6	
	7	Arrived at the Brisbane River "on the third day", and travelled up it "for nearly a month"

June 8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23 Found a canoe at Oxley Creek, returned down river for two or three days
24
25
26
27 Reached mouth of river after another two days
28 Travelled along shore of Moreton Bay
29
30 Arrived Clontarf Point "on the third day", which was also the 101st day after leaving Sydney
* * *

July
August
September 1-25
* * *

September 26 Arrived at Bribie for the first time
27
28
29
30 Pamphlet went out fishing with natives
October 1 Pamphlet and Parsons walked northwards
2 Pamphlet and Parsons returned
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15

October 16
17
18
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21
22
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31

November 1 Walked northwards "at the end of a month"
2 Arrived at Pumicestone Channel at Caloundra
3 Crossed Pumicestone Channel
4 Arrived at Mooloolah River, stopped "for three days"
5
6
7 Crossed Mooloolah River, arrived at Maroochy River
8 Walked up Maroochy River "two days"
9
10 Pamphlet left to attend a fight
11 Finnegan and Parsons crossed the Maroochy River
12 After the fight, a hunting expedition lasting a week
13 Finnegan and Parsons separated at the Noosa River
14 Finnegan turned back, and reached Bribie "after four days" (?)
15
16
17 Pamphlet probably returning
18
19 Pamphlet probably arrived back at Bribie
20 Finnegan arrived back at Bribie (?)
21 Finnegan left for Redcliffe
22
23 Arrived "on the third day"
24 Kangaroo hunt
25 Native fight
26 Walked back ten miles
27 Camped for two days to dry skins
28
29 Pamphlet rescued by Oxley
30 Finnegan rescued by Oxley

REFERENCES

1. This spelling was used by Uniacke and Field, but Oxley used "Pamphlett".
2. B. Field, ed.— *Geographical Memoirs of New South Wales*. London, John Murray, 1825. pp. 87-130.
3. This document, and most others cited in this article, are reproduced in J. G. Steele.— *Explorers of the Moreton Bay District*. Brisbane, University of Queensland Press, in press.
4. For example, "were" is spelt "where", and "lose" is rendered as "loose".
5. "Five Islands" is Illawarra.
6. NTP reads "On the fifteenth day". Note, that in those footnotes, only significant, and not all, differences in NTP are mentioned.
7. NTP reads "N.W." instead of "south-west".
8. NTP reads "imagining we had already been on shore".
9. NTP reads "sunset" instead of "sunrise".
10. NTP reads "The beach on which we landed was a low sand, surrounded by sandhills". The place was probably about two miles south of Cape Moreton.
11. NTP reads "three" instead of "two".
12. NTP makes it clear that this path was across the back of Cape Moreton.
13. These huts were on the north coast of Moreton Island.
14. This is evidently Uniacke's comment.
15. Probably Redcliffe.
16. South Passage.
17. At Amity Point.
18. Peel Island.
19. Probably at Myora, two miles north of Dunwich.
20. At Amity Point.

21. Peel Island.
22. The mainland, near Cleveland.
23. The Brisbane River. The castaways were the first white men to see it.
24. Oxley Creek.
25. Clontarf Point on the Redcliffe Peninsula (See Note 15 above).
26. 30 June 1823.
27. The Redcliffe blacks were as hospitable as those of Amity Point.
28. At Bribie Island, on Pumicestone Channel. The journey from Redcliffe to Bribie was not described.
29. Pumicestone Channel at Caloundra.
30. Mooloolah River.
31. Maroochy River.
32. At the Noosa River.
33. At Redcliffe.
34. NTP describes Uniacke as "the recorder of this narrative".
35. Brisbane River.
36. G. Mackaness, ed.— *The Discovery and Exploration of Moreton Bay and the Brisbane River*. (2 vols.). Vol. II. Sydney, D. S. Ford, 1956. p. 19.
37. J. Uniacke.— "Narrative of Mr Oxley's expedition", in Field.— *op. cit.* pp. 27-86.
38. "Facing Island" is near Gladstone.
39. Archives Office of New South Wales, Reference 2/8093.
40. C. H. Curry, "Field", in D. Pike, ed.— *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. I. Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1966. pp. 373-376.
41. Field.— *op. cit.* pp. 1-26.
42. Reference NK 6787.
43. Reference A 1194.
44. Mitchell Library, Reference C246.
45. Archives Office of New South Wales, Reference SZ9.